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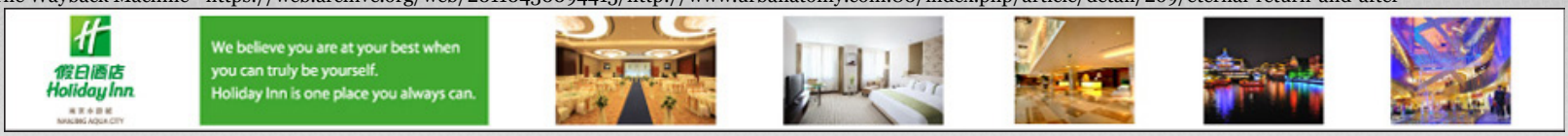

Eternal Return, and After

by nickland @ Thursday, 31 March 2011 10:55

If occult knowledge is unavailable, futurology must rely upon historical patterns. Ultimately, some variant of extrapolation is its only resource.

The hazards of extrapolation are manifold, and frequently discussed. A seemingly robust trend can be illusory, the shape of its curve can be misrecognized, and coincidental processes can disrupt it. Even more insidiously, the recognition of a trend can lead to responses that transform or nullify it.

Yet, since governments, businesses, and individuals necessarily act in accordance with models of the future, forecasting is an incessant, inevitable, and often automatic feature of social existence. Whatever the complexities of prediction, survival depends upon future-adapted decision-making. A base-level futurism is simply unavoidable. Radical skepticism – irrespective of its intellectual merits -- does not offer a practical alternative.

There are only four fundamental ways things can go: they can remain the same, they can cycle, they can shrink, or they can grow. In reality these trend-lines are usually inter-tangled. Among complex systems, stability is typically meta-stability, which is preserved through cycling, whilst growth and shrinkage are often components of a larger-scale, cyclic wave.

The historical imagination of all ancient cultures was dominated by great cycles. In the Vedic culture of India, time unfolded as regular, degenerative epochs (yugas) that subdivided each 'Day of Brahma' (4.1 billion years in length). Chinese time was shaped by the metabolism of Imperial dynasties. "Long united, the empire must divide. Long divided, it must unite," begins the Romance of the Three Kingdoms. Mesoamerican civilizations envisaged world history as a succession of creations and destructions. In the West, Plato described the history of the city as a great cycle, degenerating through phases of Timocracy (or rule by the virtuous), Oligarchy, Democracy, and Tyranny.

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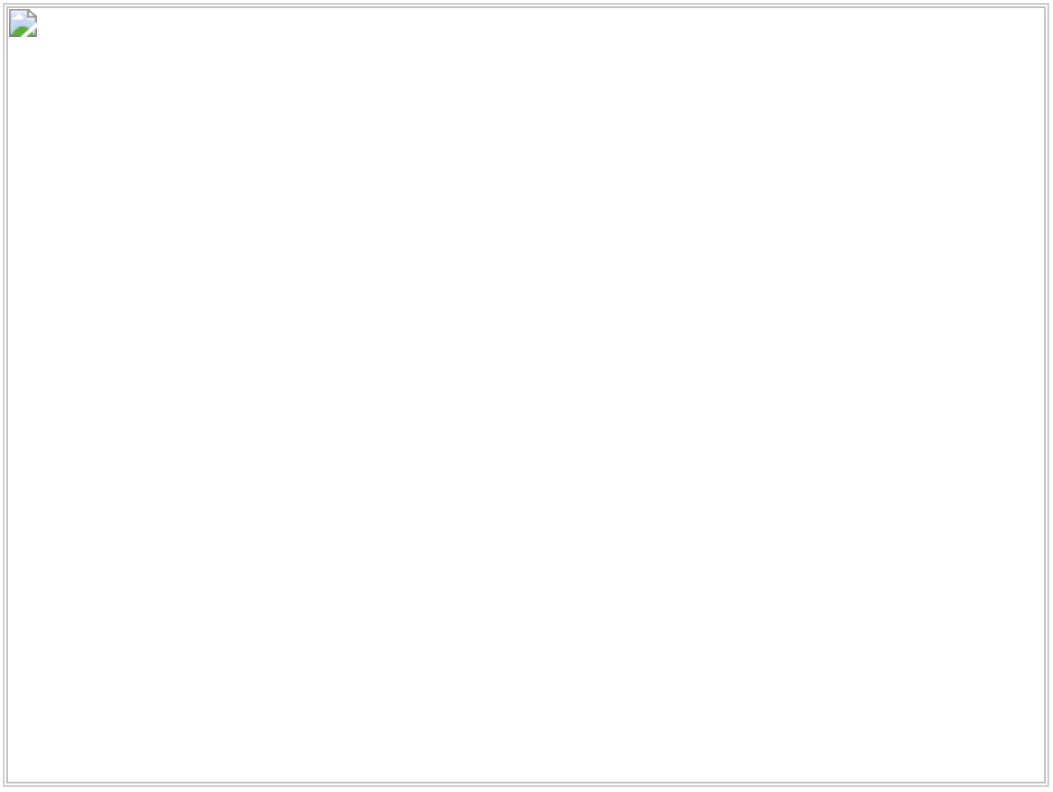
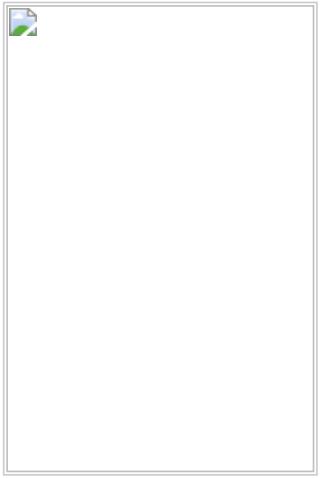


The ages of mankind described by Hesiod, and later Ovid, are less obviously cyclical, as is the esc
from ancient Judaism by the Abrahamic faiths. In these cases too, however, the course of history
fundamentally degenerative, and guided to the restoration of a sacred origin (as described by Mir
myth of Eternal Return).

Even Karl Marx remains captivated by this mythic historical pattern, in its Abrahamic variant. His
development begins with an Edenic 'primitive communism' that falls into the alienated degenerac
into a series of ages. The eschatological culmination of history in communist revolution thus com
a moment of sacred restoration (of authentic 'species being'). It is no coincidence that this mytho
of Marxism has impinged far more deeply upon popular consciousness than its intricate mathema
economic dynamics within 'the capitalist mode of production', despite the fact that Marx's writing
upon the latter. A great cycle feels like home.

In modern times, the clearest example of history in the ancient, great cycle mode, is found in the
socialist philosopher: Oswald Spengler. Modeling civilizations on the life-cycles of organic beings
inevitable decay through predictable phases. For the West, firmly locked into the downside of the
degeneration can be confidently anticipated. Spengler's withering pessimism seems not to have c
cultural comfort derived from his archetypal historical scheme.



Eliade describes the myth of Eternal Return as a refuge from the “terror of history.” Firmly rooted and the cycle of the seasons, it sets the basic template for traditional cultures. By identifying wha already been timelessly commemorated, it promises the pre-adaptation of existing social arrange behavior to unencountered things, psychologically neutralizing the threat of radically unpreceden been here before, and somehow we survived. Winter does not last forever.

It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the conception of progressive historical time has been so M. Smart, summarizes the conclusions reached by historian J. D. Bury in his The Idea of Progress progress in the material realm was missed, amazingly, even for most of the European Renaissanc by the 1650s, near the end of this cultural explosion, did the idea of an unstoppable force of pro as a possibility to the average literate mind.” The idea of progress, as continuous, innovative grov and provides its defining cultural characteristic.

Moderns found themselves, for the first time, cast outside the cosmic nursery of Eternal Return. A them.

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